

Guidance Issued on Ed-Tech Stimulus Funds

By **Katie Ash**

Federal officials have **issued guidance** for using more than \$650 million in the economic-stimulus package to boost educational technology programs in the nation's schools.

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The guidance for the federal **Enhancing Education Through Technology** program details how the money should be distributed by states to local grantees and what districts can use it for, and it outlines the reporting and transparency requirements attached to the funds, which are scheduled to be released to states starting today.

The bump to the Enhancing Education Through Technology, or EETT, program in the **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act** comes at a time

when the budget for the primary federal ed-tech initiative faces significant cuts—from \$267 million to just \$100 million—in President Obama's proposed fiscal 2010 budget.

While ed-tech organizations have been disappointed with the budget proposal, the stimulus funds and the priority the guidance places on innovative approaches to using technology in schools provide some reasons for optimism, experts say.

"I think they've done a very nice job of articulating the systemic approach that is necessary for technology to make a difference in the classroom," said Sara Hall, the deputy director of the State Educational Technology Directors Association, based in Glen Burnie, Md. "Buying stuff does not change student achievement. What changes student achievement is the technical support, the curricular support, and the ongoing, embedded professional development."

Grant recipients, for example, must spend at least 25 percent of the total funding received on "ongoing, sustained, and intensive, high-quality professional development," the document says.

States may retain up to 5 percent of the funding for state-level ed-tech projects, and the rest must be distributed to schools and districts.

One surprise in the guidance is how the funds may be distributed to schools, said Keith R. Krueger, the chief executive officer for the Washington-based Consortium for School Networking. The guidance requires states to award at least 50 percent, and as much as 100 percent, of the funds on a competitive basis, so that those applications deemed to be the best will share at least half of the grant awards. The other half of the funds may be awarded through a formula based on what's used for the Title I program, which favors schools and districts serving disadvantaged students.

"I think one thing we will all be watching is how many, or if, states go 100 percent competitive for EETT, versus 50 percent formula and 50 percent competitive," Mr. Krueger said. "It's interesting



that the U.S. Department of Education encouraged states to go 100 percent competitive with EETT funds under [the stimulus act]. That certainly spurs innovation."

But that means that some districts in some states might not get a check, Mr. Krueger said.

The Education Department, he said, is "encouraging competition over easy distribution, which is probably good for encouraging 21st-century use of technology in education, but it may take longer to get out the money for the economic stimulus."

Guiding Principles

The four guiding principles for distributing the funds, says the document, are to "spend funds quickly to save and create jobs; improve student achievement through school improvement and reform; ensure transparency, reporting, and accountability; and invest one-time funds from the economic stimulus program thoughtfully to minimize the 'funding cliff.' "

Mary Ann Wolf, the executive director of SETDA, also supports the emphasis on competitive grants.

"The strong encouragement to distribute the ARRA funds through a 100 percent competitive process provides states with the ability to conduct more rigorous evaluation and development and in-depth programs to turn around low-performing schools and address the [guidance's] four assurances," she said.

Another piece of the guidance many ed-tech organizations were watching closely is the reporting and transparency requirements tied to the funding. The guidance stipulates that all EETT money from the economic stimulus be tracked and reported quarterly to the public.

Specifically, states are required to report data on grantees, including the percentages of: districts that have effectively and fully integrated technology; classrooms with Internet access in high- and low-poverty schools; teachers who meet their state technology standards; and students who meet state technology standard by the end of 8th grade.

Having those requirements defined in the guidance, said Ms. Hall of SETDA, can help state and local officials begin to formulate their projects and plan systemically as the money is distributed.